

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 28, 2015

Joseph “Sepp” Blatter
President
Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
FIFA-Strasse 20
P.O. Box 8044
Zurich, Switzerland

Dear Mr. Blatter:

As members of Congress we are deeply concerned by the stark, ongoing disparities in pay, publicity, and investment between women’s and men’s FIFA soccer. We urge your organization to comprehensively reassess its policies and commercial decisions and terminate any that perpetuate this inequality. FIFA’s stated mission is to “develop football everywhere and for all,” and we ask you to pursue that goal with an equal commitment to women’s and men’s soccer, while informing us in detail about the nature and extent of your efforts.¹

Over the last few decades, women’s soccer has continued to increase in popularity as soccer fans young and old are exposed to the high level of talent and competition in the Women’s World Cup. The 2015 Women’s World Cup was the most-viewed soccer game in American history, garnering 26.7 million viewers—more than the 2014 Men’s World Cup, the NBA Finals, the World Series, or the Stanley Cup. Yet the amounts of television coverage, corporate sponsorship, and promotion were dramatically smaller than those for the Men’s World Cup in 2014.²³

Inequities in pay are indefensible. The three-time world championship winning Team USA received a \$2 million prize, just one-fourth of the \$8 million that a men’s team receives for *losing* in the first elimination round of the Men’s World Cup. And the total payout for the Women’s World Cup this year is 40 times less, at \$15 million, than the 2014 Men’s World Cup award of \$576 million.⁴

FIFA doesn’t invest in women’s teams proportionally either. FIFA only puts about 15 percent of global development money into women’s and girls’ programs. It has also provided women players with unequal facilities such as astroturf playing fields instead of grass ones (which prompted a discrimination lawsuit that FIFA avoided through sheer delay).⁵⁶

FIFA and other corporate actors often cite the weak American and global market for women’s sports in order to justify these inequities. This year the Women’s World Cup has proven that it’s time to shelve this false perception. There is ample evidence that FIFA has underinvested in women’s sports out of motives ranging from apathy to discrimination. In 2004, you suggested that the way to improve Women’s Soccer was to “let the

¹ <http://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/>

² <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2015/07/06/the-sad-gender-economics-of-the-womens-world-cup/>

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/07/sports/soccer/womens-world-cup-final-was-most-watched-soccer-game-in-united-states-history.html>

⁴ <http://www.politico.eu/article/world-cup-women-pay-gap-gender-equality/>

⁵ <http://espn.go.com/espnw/news-commentary/2015worldcup/article/13224279/fifa-do-more-develop-women-game-globally>

⁶ <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/01/21/378896641/soccer-players-end-lawsuit-over-artificial-turf-at-women-s-world-cup;>

https://sports.vice.com/en_us/article/how-fifa-killed-the-womens-world-cup-lawsuit

women play in more feminine clothes like they do in volleyball. They could, for example, have tighter shorts. Female players are pretty, if you excuse me for saying so.”⁷

Moreover, declining to cover and promote women’s sports because they don’t attract enough viewers creates a vicious cycle. Without adequate funding, women’s soccer fans are left searching the internet to find game times. And even when they do, the coverage available is limited. According to a study by researchers at Purdue University and the University of Southern California (USC), only 2 percent of airtime on ESPN’s *SportsCenter* in 2014 was devoted to coverage of any women’s sports.⁸ It is time to give up these flimsy rationalizations and recognize that women’s sports are popular, and as the status of women worldwide improves, the sport will only become more popular. FIFA is positioned to become the engine of investment in global women’s soccer, and could easily do so if it were to decide that it was a worthwhile goal.⁹

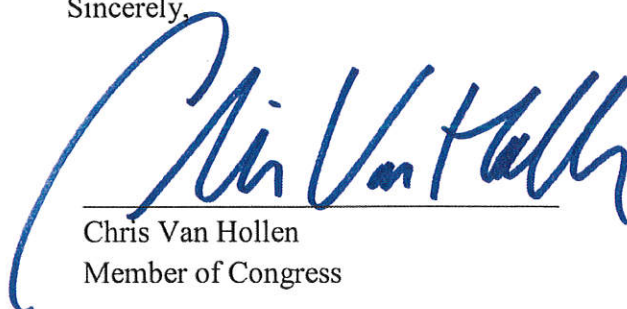
To that end, FIFA should review its policies to ensure that it is no longer part of the problem. Regarding investment, FIFA should follow the example that Wimbledon took back in 2007 and equalize the prize money for the Women’s World Cup.¹⁰ And it should equalize the amount of development money devoted to women’s teams worldwide.

FIFA should immediately put in place policies to ensure equal facilities for FIFA women and men, so as to eliminate inequities like the turf vs. grass playing fields. It should require and demand certification from participating teams to provide sufficient pay, health care, training facilities, equipment, and travel for their players. Commercially, FIFA should reassess all of its television contracts and promotional arrangements to make sure they embody sound business principles and a devotion to expanding the global role of women’s soccer—rather than factually unjustifiable assumptions about a limited audience for women’s sports.¹¹ Finally, FIFA should develop a long-term strategy to address the current gross disparity between women’s and men’s soccer.

Women’s sports are not a sideshow, and FIFA should do its utmost to ensure it doesn’t treat them like one. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Jackie Speier
Member of Congress


Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress

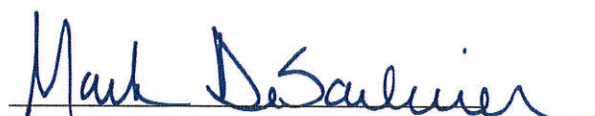
⁷ https://sports.vice.com/en_us/article/how-fifa-has-hurt-womens-soccer

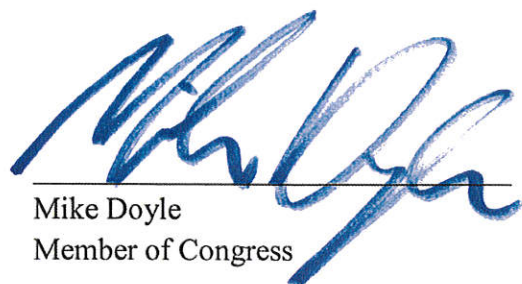
⁸ <http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2015/06/30/us-womens-soccer-versus-germany-espn>


⁹ <http://www.bustle.com/articles/89485-why-dont-female-soccer-players-get-equal-pay-inside-the-economics-of-professional-womens-soccer>


¹⁰ <http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2015/07/10/the-inspiring-story-of-how-venus-williams-helped-win-equal-pay-for-women-players-at-wimbledon/>


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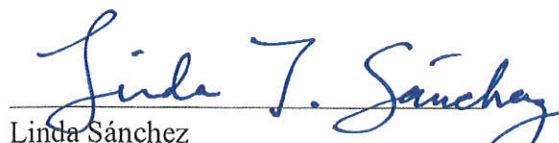

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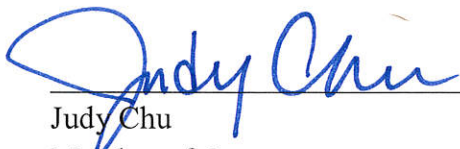
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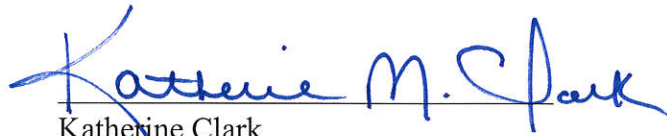
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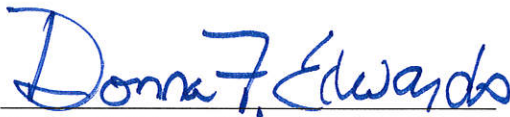
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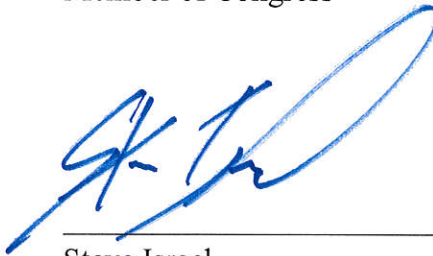
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